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# Jackson, watchdogs at odds over trash-to-electricity plan

## At issue: Amount of emissions from proposed plant

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Plain Dealer Reporter

Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson has returned from a fact-finding trip to Japan, ready to import technology that would turn garbage into electricity.

But he's getting a cold reception from critics. Ohio Citizen Action and other watchdog groups say emissions from a "gasification"

plant proposed for the city's Ridge Road waste-transfer station could be as dirty as the fallout that comes from burning coal.

The plant, which proponents and critics say would be the first of its kind in the country, wouldn't directly burn garbage like "mass burn" incinerators now used in power plants in Harrisburg, Pa., and other cities.

Instead it would heat food, yard

waste and other trash left after recyclable material is removed. Steam yielded in the process would fuel turbines and create electricity for Cleveland Public Power.

If the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency gives the go-ahead soon, the city could start construction next year. The plant could begin operating in 2014.

SEE TRASH | B2

**Want more information?**

Ohio Citizen Action and other watchdog groups will hold a community meeting on Cleveland's plans for a plant that would heat garbage and turn it into electricity.

**When:** 6:30 p.m. Tuesday

**Where:** Neighborhood Family Practice, 3569 Ridge Road

## TRASH

FROM B1

**Trash-to-electricity plan gets cold reception**

Jackson believes the plant, combined with automated trash collection and mandatory curbside recycling, can offer a clean, cheaper alternative to dumping trash in a Stark County landfill. The price of construction is expected to top \$150 million, but the city hopes to offset that with reduced labor costs and income from selling recyclables and fuel pellets, which the plant could produce.

"What we're doing is driving us to bankruptcy," Jackson said, referring to the present system of garbage disposal. "This is not sustainable."

Jackson and other city officials returned Sept. 30 from a five-day trip to Takasaki, a city 50 miles northwest of Tokyo. They met with government and corporate leaders and saw how technology developed by the Kinsai Sangyo Co. is used to dispose of waste at a biometical facility in a densely populated urban area.

Cleveland has focused on Kinsai's technology and given a \$1.5 million contract to Peter Tien, a New Jersey consultant who owns U.S. licensing rights to Kinsai's system. But Jackson has pledged to bid the work.

Cleveland Councilmen Matt Zone and Kevin Kelley accompanied Jackson to Japan and were impressed with what they saw.

Zone, who represents the Ridge Road area, said the Cleveland plant could herald a new way of looking at garbage disposal. Kelley, chairman of the council's Public Utilities Committee, said he still has concerns about truck traffic and finances but no longer thinks of the technology as "pie in the sky."

"I've made no secret of my reservations," said Kelley, who described the Japan plant as quiet and odorless. "I left with a sense of, 'Yes, this does work.'"

While Cleveland says the plant would operate well within EPA emissions guidelines, Sandy Buchanan, executive director of Ohio Citizen Action, said docu-

ments obtained from the city show it would still rank as one of the region's largest sources of soot and particulate matter and the largest source of mercury.

"These are significant pollution numbers," Buchanan said. "This is not a green facility."

Jackson's spokeswoman, Andrea Taylor, challenged Buchanan's assertion. She said the figures cited by the Ohio Citizen Action leader would be the maximum allowed under the city's permit. Actual emissions would be far less.

Buchanan said the documents also suggest the city would run the plant at less than full capacity in a deliberate attempt to keep certain pollutants just under thresholds for tighter regulation. Tien said operating projections take into account down time for maintenance and repair.

Neil Seldman, president of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, thinks the reason there are no trash gasification plants in the United States is that investors are reluctant to provide backing. The Washington, D.C., group works for "environmentally sound and equitable community development."

Developers have delayed plans for a smaller gasification plant that would supply power to a utility run by the city of Clyde in Sandusky County. Duke Fultz, head of a waste disposal and recycling company that would provide the raw material, said he believed the developers had yet to obtain financing.

Tien said private investors are ready to put money into Cleveland's project if the city decides against public financing. He declined to name the investors.

Seldman said Cleveland could save tens of millions of dollars by shelling the plant and adding discarded food, yard waste and soiled paper to the list of items it already recycles. He said a booming compost market is fueling demand for such material, making a gamble on gasification unnecessary.

"The whole thing doesn't make sense," he said. "This flies in the face of best practices."

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